THE ANGRY WORD

"MANY years ago, when I was a small boy," a gentleman said recently, "a Mr. Gorton was pastor of our church—a godly and gifted man, for whom I grew to have an admiration that almost amounted to idolatry. I listened to his earnest sermons with rapt attention, and they were sermons that an intelligent boy could understand and enjoy. My father was an elder in the church, and Mr. Gorton often called at our house. His smile and his brisk, cheery greeting were things to look forward to and to think of pleasantly afterwards. I remember thinking that one of his prayers, when he knelt with the family at the close of his call, must be worth at least a hundred of those which father offered every night and morning. Not that I discredited father's goodness and sincerity, but Mr. Gorton seemed to be something above a common man, more like Moses and Paul and the other holy personages we read of in the Bible.

"If it had been customary to receive children into the church, I should have joined before I was ten years old, for I had implicit faith in a religion that could make a man like Mr. Gorton. As a matter of fact, however, I did not become a church member until I was well past thirty, and, strangely enough, Mr. Gorton was indirectly responsible for the delay.

"One crisp, starlit winter night I went to the back door of the parsonage with a basket of dishes. There was to be a donation party the next evening, and father had sent me from the horse sheds with the basket while he did some errands at the store. As the girl took the dishes at the door, I heard Mr. Gorton's voice raised in high, angry tones, and I turned away quickly, forgetting the message that was to go with the basket. If Mr. Gorton used any unseemly language, I did not hear it, but the mere fact that he was angry, like ordinary men, shocked me. I ran all the way to the sheds with the unreasoning fear that the minister might follow me to ask about the dishes, and thus be shamed and humiliated by knowing that I had overheard his burst of ill-temper. It was weeks before I could look Mr. Gorton in the face, and I think I never again heard him preach or pray without seeming to hear those high-pitched tones of anger.

"Of course in my boyish idealism I expected too much. The best and godliest of men have their faults; but the impressions made upon my mind by that incident have never been effaced. It has made me more careful not to say or do anything that might seem to others inconsistent with a Christian profession. If the New Testament means what it says, we make a high claim for ourselves when we stand before the world as loyal disciples of Jesus Christ. We sometimes resent criticism, but do our critics really demand any more of us than our loyalty to Christ demands? And is there not a grave danger of wounding the idealism of some one who takes the teaching of the gospel at its face value?"

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